The People’s Voice, The People’s Choice: 
An Overview of Participatory Budgeting in the United States

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Participatory budgeting was launched in the U.S. in 2009 in Chicago, Illinois, by a member of the city’s Board of Aldermen (the city council) who used $1 million of his discretionary funds to bring his constituents directly into the local budget decision-making process. By 2018, there were 23 more U.S. jurisdictions with a PB process in place: 12 with PB in selected areas (districts); six with a citywide initiative; five with an initiative to allocate specific pots of money, e.g., CDBG funds (see Table 1); and six with an initiative to bring young voters or high school students into budget decisions. In this descriptive paper, we provide a synopsis of PB initiatives in the U.S. based on publically available information and personal interviews with individuals involved in the PB process. Our paper adds to the literature by providing a review of PB initiatives across the U.S. that will be particularly useful for readers who are looking for a quick purview of the topic or who have limited knowledge of PB.

Citizen participation in government decision-making is a “…valuable element of democratic citizenship…” (Michels 2011, p. 275). As Donald Moynihan, a foremost public administration scholar, writes: “Participation is particularly important because it fosters good governance, promotes transparency, increases social justice by involving the poor and excluded, and helps individuals become better citizens” (2007, p. 58). Citizen participation in the public budgeting process is particularly important given that the budget is the single most important policy statement of most governments.

Citizen participation in the budget process in the U.S. dates back more than 300 years to when (male) residents of New England voted at “Town Meetings” ... a form of direct democracy in which a community gathers and votes on budgets and policies” (NE Historical Society, n.d.). Town meetings focused on budgets are still held today throughout New England (Galvin, n.d.). Other ways that citizens directly participate in the budget process include input on boards and councils, responses to surveys, and participatory budgeting (PB), a process in which residents directly “…decide on, or contribute to, decisions made on the destination of all or part of the available public resources” (Cabannes, 2004, p. 20). Godwin opines that “PB ...gives residents more influence than provided through typical venues like public hearings, workshops, advisory committees, and neighborhood outreach” (Godwin, 2018, p. 132). In fact, PB is seen by some scholars as one of the more successful participatory instruments of the past 20 to 30 years (Sintomer, et al., 2012). In this paper, we provide a synopsis of PB initiatives in the U.S. based on publically available information and personal interviews with individuals involved in the PB process. The first section of the paper describes PB initiatives in subareas (districts) of U.S. cities, with a particular focus on Chicago, Illinois – the birthplace of PB in the U.S.– and New York City, the jurisdiction with the largest PB initiative in the nation. The second section looks at citywide initiatives, beginning with Vallejo, California, the first place in the U.S. to implement a PB process across the whole city. The third section discusses PB initiatives focused on the use of PB to allocate government monies funding specific activities such as the arts, followed by a discussion of PB initiatives focused on youth. The final section provides a conclusion and presents some suggestions for further research on PB in the U.S.

Research on PB in the United States has generally
focused on its potential as a democratic innovation (Godwin, 2018; Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017). Extant literature has reported on selected places that have implemented PB, summarized data for all PB initiatives, or has required time-consuming searches for information on each PB jurisdiction. The synopsis presented in this paper provides a review of practices across the U.S. that will be particularly useful for readers looking for a quick overview of PB or who have limited knowledge of the topic. It should be noted that the paper describes PB in the U.S. as of 2018. As such, changes that have occurred between research and publication are not reflected in the paper; more recent books and articles are also not referenced.

**OVERVIEW**

PB originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989 when it was introduced by the newly elected Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores) to help restore trust in, and engagement with, the city’s political system emerging in the wake of the country’s two decades under military dictatorship. Since then, PB has spread to other locations across the world with international organizations playing an important role in supporting its implementation in developing countries. Both the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have designated PB as a “best practice.”

Although the exact number of places that have implemented a PB process is not clear, it is generally reported that there are PB initiatives in at least 1,500 locations worldwide (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012), with one estimate reaching as high as 3,000 places (Cabannes & Lipietz, 2018) “... as diverse as New York City, Northern Mexico, and rural Kenya” (Wampler, et al., 2018, p. 3). In the United States, as of 2018, some form of participatory budget process had been implemented in 24 jurisdictions (see Map 1), some with multiple initiatives that are sometimes counted as individual PB
processes. Places implementing PB range in size from New York City with more than 8 million residents to Wickenburg, Arizona, with fewer than 8,000 residents. A PB process has also been undertaken in some places as initiatives for youth, some of whom are not yet able to vote in general elections, as well as in high schools and even in a few middle and primary schools. The great majority of PB initiatives have been in the northeastern part of the U.S. and on the west coast, especially in California (see Map 1).

Worldwide, participatory budgeting has been established to meet several objectives, reflecting local conditions and needs. In the U.S., participatory budgeting has generally been adopted to mobilize citizen engagement and to increase trust in government (Swaner, 2017).

“With sagging voter turnout, plummeting trust in government, and multi-billion dollar elections, U.S. democracy is marred by chasms between government and citizens. Gaps may be greatest at state and local levels, where voter turnout is especially low and citizens only rarely attend public meetings or contact local elected officials about policy decisions. Against this backdrop, communities across the country are experimenting with ‘participatory budgeting’” (Jabola-Carolus, 2015, para. 1).

The desire to mobilize citizens and to increase public trust is what led to the launching of PB in the U.S in 2009 by Joe Moore, the alderman representing Ward 49, one of Chicago’s 50 wards (districts) that comprise the City’s Board of Alderman (the city council). Moore had learned about the PB experience in Porto Alegre, Brazil, when he attended a U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2007. Upon his return to Chicago, Moore considered how PB could transfer to the U.S., specifically to his ward, seeing it as a way to bring the community into the budget process in Chicago where he had observed “so many decisions...made from the top down” (Clark, 2014). Moore saw PB as: “... one step toward the democratization of public institutions and the restoration of public trust in the democratic system” (Schugurensky, 2012).

To help launch PB in his ward, Moore connected with Josh Lerner, Executive Director of the Participatory Budget Project (PBP) a non-profit organization formed in 2009 by Lerner and Gianpaolo Baiocchi to advocate for PB and to help governments, institutions, and organizations to implement participatory budgeting processes. Since then, the PBP has been involved in most PB initiatives in the U.S. with its support ranging from helping with specific stages of the budget process, to fully implementing a PB initiative, to preparing and/or updating “rule books” for the PB process. Rule books provide up-to-date guidelines for voter eligibility, participant responsibilities, and other information.

Once the PB initiative was up and running in Chicago, the PBP brought the concept to New York City (NYC) in collaboration with Community Voices Heard (CVH), a civil society organization, founded in 1994, whose mission is to build power for “...individuals and families of color in low-income communities throughout New York State” (CVH, n.d.). Support from the community, and of organizations like CVH, is critical for PB to succeed. Another critical element for a successful PB initiative is support from people with the authority to let residents decide how to spend part of the city’s money. In NYC, four members of the 51-member NYC Council, which has to approve the mayor’s budget, decided to implement PB in their districts. One of the four would become president of the City Council in 2014.

In the U.S., as well as in the rest of the world, “PB is highly adaptable [and]... has many different manifestations” (Gilman, 2016, p. 3). However, while there are variations around the PB theme in the U.S., the prevailing multi-stage process is similar, with citizen participation generally beginning with stakeholders attending public assemblies:

“...to brainstorm spending ideas that could improve their communities. They select ... Budget
Delegates’ to represent their neighborhoods. With guidance and training from PBP and other experts, the Delegates transform the initial ideas into concrete project proposals...people then vote on the proposals they want to see in their communities. The government ... then funds and implements winning projects” (PBP, 2014, p. 2).

PB INITIATIVES IN SUBAREAS OF U.S. CITIES

Unlike PB in Porto Alegre and in other cities around the world where the process has been implemented citywide, 13 initiatives in the U.S. have been launched in subareas (districts) of cities. Each of these subarea initiatives are described below starting with Chicago, the birthplace of PB in the U.S.

Chicago, Illinois

With a population of 2.7 million people (US Census Bureau, 2020) and a budget of close to $9 billion (Chicago, 2018), Chicago is the third-largest city in the United States. Under its mayor-council form of government, the city is divided into 50 wards (districts) each of which is represented by one elected alderman on the Board of Aldermen (City Council), Chicago’s legislative body. Although the city’s Office of Management and Budget, within the office of the Mayor, is responsible for initiating the city’s budget, individual aldermen play an important role in Chicago’s governance and budget negotiations. As Gilman and Wampler (2019) state, “Chicago’s aldermen often have personal relationships with their constituents and effectively serve as “mayors” of their wards, with significant decision-making power” (p. 11).

Each year since 1994, all aldermen have been allocated a line item of $1.3 million in the city’s budget to spend within their wards. This allocation is referred to as “menu money,” because there is a “menu” of infrastructure projects it can fund, e.g., street resurfacing and sidewalk repairs. From its beginnings, the selection of projects to be paid for with menu money was made at the discretion of each alderman for his or her ward. In 2009, however, Joe Moore, the Ward 49 Alderman, decided to implement a PB process in which constituents would provide input that would inform his decisions regarding which local infrastructure projects to fund with $1 million of his menu money. The availability of a dedicated source of public funding, such as this menu money, is a sine qua non for a successful PB initiative (PBP, n.d.).

“In 2009, Moore brought together leaders from 40 to 50 civic, religious and community organizations, and asked each of them to appoint one or two representatives from their organization to serve on a steering committee to design the process and timetable for allocating the 49th Ward menu money” (NLC, 2020).

Working with the PBP, the steering committee put together the rules and procedures for “PB49.” One of the ongoing responsibilities of the steering committee (with assistance from the PBP) has been to prepare and update Chicago’s PB rule book that establishes the guidelines for the process, e.g., who may submit project proposals and who may vote in project selection. As detailed in the rule book, residents and others with a nexus to the ward, e.g., business owners, are eligible to nominate projects for consideration. All ward residents 16 years of age or older, regardless of U.S. citizenship status, are permitted to vote in the project selection process. These requirements are more inclusive than those for the city’s general elections in which residents have to be U.S. citizens at least 18 years of age.

In 2009, when PB49 began, 1,600 people voted to select which infrastructure projects to fund (Summers, 2011). Over the next few years, four more aldermen implemented the PB process. Two aldermen, however, would drop it after one year. One of the two who dropped it said that he did not agree with the projects for his ward selected through the PB process and that citizen participation was “sparse” (Silets, 2017).

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5 A ward may permit a lower PB voting age if its alderman and Ward Leadership Committee agree.

6 A Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District reallocates funds from property taxes to encourage investment within the district. Any tax revenues collected as a result of an increase in property values go into the TIF fund and can be used by the city for a wide range of purposes within the TIF to promote redevelopment.
By the end of 2017, nine Chicago aldermen were using a PB process, with 6,723 people in the participating wards casting ballots in the project selection process (Lydersen, 2017; PBChicago, 2016). Several other initiatives have also been undertaken in Chicago using the PB process to inform economic development strategies. For example, a PB process has been used to allocate monies generated in Tax Increment Finance (TIF) districts and “...to fund microenterprise lending for local businesses, a culinary workforce development program...and green roofs for buildings in a key commercial corridor” (PBChicago, 2016, para 3). Students in a number of Chicago high schools have also used the PB process to decide how to spend monies for school improvements (Thea Crum, July 2018, personal communication with authors).

PB in Chicago has many advocates. In fact, PB turned out to be so popular with voters in Alderman Moore’s ward, that he credits it with reviving his political fortunes. After barely winning a run-off election in 2007, Moore was easily re-elected in 2011 (Lepeska 2012). Proponents of PB in Chicago “...say participatory budgeting is good because it takes some of the politics out of government spending, and it allows residents to push for fixes in neighborhoods the city might otherwise ignore “(Vevea, 2017). As further evidence of support for PB in Chicago, “In November 2014, the Mayor and City Council voted to fund the hiring of a new City of Chicago Assistant Budget Director whose primary task is to support alderman as they implement PB projects” (Crum et al., 2015, p. 3).

A challenge to PB in Chicago is that relatively few people have participated in the project selection process (Lydersen 2017). In addition, some PB participants have expressed their concerns that it is “...focused more on creating networks of support for their alderman than promoting genuine engagement in decision making” (Gilman, 2016, p. 10).

New York City, New York

With its 8.4 million residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) and an annual budget of $85 billion (New York, 2018), New York City (NYC) is the largest city in the United States. The city has a strong mayor-council form of government and is divided into 51 districts, each of which is represented by an elected member of the City Council, NYC’s legislative body. One way that Council members exercise their role in the City’s annual budget process is through what is known as discretionary funding, in which specific amounts of budget dollars (referred to as “member items”) are allocated to each Council member. The size of the allocation is based on several factors such as district needs identified in member requests for discretionary funding to the City Council leadership.

Until 2011, all decisions regarding how discretionary funds were spent in each of the districts were made by their Council member. In 2011, after being introduced to the concept of participatory budgeting by PBP and CVH, four council members decided to let their constituents allocate a portion of their discretionary funds through the PB process. Working with the PBP, the four members developed the PB process by which residents would have input into spending decisions for at least $1 million of their discretionary funds. Council members implementing a PB process are required to allocate at least this amount, annually, to the process in their districts.

In May 2011, a city-wide Steering Committee (SC), comprised of 42 organizations and led by the PBP and CVH, was established to plan and oversee the PB process. The SC included the four Council Members initiating a PB process, representatives of community boards in these districts, and representatives from community-based organizations in the participating districts and from city-wide civil society organizations. The SC was given the task of putting together the PB rule book and distributing promotional materials. District committees (DC) were also established to coordinate the implementation of the PB process in each district. As described in the PB rule book, a wide range of stakeholders in the community, e.g., residents and business owners, would be permitted to nominate

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7 Community boards are advisory groups in districts located in the five counties (boroughs) that comprise NYC. Each board is composed of 50 members appointed by the Borough President, the highest elected officeholder in each borough.
capital projects of their choice. All district residents at least 11 years of age (or in the 6th grade) would be permitted to vote in the project selection process, including persons excluded from participating in general elections such as residents who were not U.S. citizens (PBNYC, n.d.).

In September 2011, the four Council Members and the city-wide Steering Committee officially launched PBNYC. In October 2011, PBNYC began with more than 2,000 residents attending 27 neighborhood assemblies across the four districts to begin the project selection process. An evaluation of the 2011-2012 pilot year reported that the PBNYC engaged 7,736 people, including 2,138 neighborhood assembly and 245 online participants; 251 budget delegates; and almost 6,000 voters (UJC, 2012). Many of the participants were residents who have historically been excluded from the political process, e.g., people of color, low-income people, and members of immigrant groups, all of whom turned out to vote at higher rates than they had in previous general elections (UJC, 2012). By Cycle 5 (2015-2016), PBNYC had grown from four to 28 districts, with 51,000 residents voting to allocate more than $30 million (NYC Council, n.d.).

By Cycle 7 (2017-2018), 31 of the city’s 51 Council districts had initiated a PB process (New York City Council n.d.), with “[m]ore than 99,250 residents age 11 and older ...deciding how to spend $36,618,553...” (PBP 2018a). In addition to the PB initiatives in the 31 districts, over 400 public high schools were also brought into New York’s PB process, each receiving $2,000 of city budget money for students to allocate among competing projects (PBP 2018).

Added work and insufficient resources were seen by some Council members as reasons not to implement PB. As one of the 20 non-participating Council members stated: “Participatory budgeting takes an extraordinary amount of office time and resources for no discernible improvement in outcomes over working through the existing vast civic infrastructure for public participation” (O’Connor, 2015.) But, in the November 2018 election voters approved a change to the NYC Charter that would bring PB to all 51 districts in 2020. Once an allocation for PB is put into the City’s budget, PBNYC will become the largest PB initiative in the country, possibly in the world (Lerner, 2018). As stated in the PBP News:

“In a landslide vote, New Yorkers voted YES on Ballot Proposal #2, creating a Civic Engagement Commission tasked with setting up citywide PB. We expect this process to more than double the size of PB in the US and to raise the bar for PB around the world. This is the first time...that PB was approved by voters in a referendum” (PBP, 2018).

San Jose, California

With more than one million residents (US Census Bureau, 2020) and a $3.5 billion budget (San Jose, 2017-2018), San Jose is the tenth most-populous city in the United States. The city has a manager-council form of government with the mayor and council setting policy and an appointed city manager executing the policy. The city is divided into 10 districts, each of which is represented by an elected member on the city council, San Jose’s legislative body. In summer 2015, the mayor of San Jose announced that $100,000 would be set aside in the city budget for a PB pilot project; in fall 2015, the pilot was initiated in five District 3 neighborhoods. A steering committee, composed of volunteers from the District’s neighborhoods, prepared the San Jose PB rule book with guidelines for the PB process based on “…examples of other successful Participatory Budgeting programs, with assistance from the City of Vallejo as well as Cambridge, MA, the New York City Council, and the PBP” (D3decides, 2019).

All stakeholders in the district may make project
suggestions; all residents ages 15 and over can vote in the project selection process. More than 500 voters participated in the first round of PB project selection. In the second round, the District 3 PB budget was increased to $250,000; again, more than 500 voters participating in the selection process. In the third round, 500 voters decided how to allocate $200,000 (D3decides, 2019).

Another three of the 10 San Jose districts have also implemented a PB process, 1, 2, and 5. In District 1, the PB process began in late 2017 with 300 residents voting on the allocation of $200,000 (D1decides, n.d.). In District 2, the PB process has run for two years. In Round 1, $595,000 was allocated for the process. In Round 2, PB participants cast 3,007 votes, allocating $480,000 for five projects (San Jose, n.d.(a)). In District 5, PB was implemented for two years, with over 750 votes cast for 9 projects (2016-17), totaling $99,500. There is also a PB process underway in at least one San Jose high school in response to a State of California school funding formula requirement that school districts consult students before writing their annual spending plans (Californians for Justice, n.d.).

San Francisco, California
San Francisco, a consolidated city-county, has more than 883,000 residents (US Census Bureau, 2020) and an annual budget of close to $10 billion (San Francisco n.d.). The San Francisco mayor is also the County Executive; the Board of Supervisors, San Francisco’s 11-member legislative body also functions as its City Council. In 2012, working with the PBP and other non-profit organizations, including the Right to the City Alliance, the president of the Board of Supervisors at that time announced the inauguration of a PB initiative in San Francisco. Each member of the Board of Supervisors was to be provided with $100,000 in discretionary funds from the 2012-2013 budget to be used in his or her district for programs, activities, and capital projects allocated through the PB process.

A pilot PB process was initiated in District 3 with approximately 500 voters participating (PBP, 2013a), but this would be the only year in which the PB process was used in the District. In 2013-2014, PB was introduced in Districts 7 and 10, with each allocated $100,000. All residents ages 16 and over, and anyone working, living, or playing in the District, were permitted to submit project proposals and to vote in the PB project selection process (SFPBD, n.d.). In the 2013-14 PB process, 1,060 voters participated in District 7, and 851 in District 10 (Cohen, 2010; Erica Maybaum, August 2018, personal conversation with author). Jumping to 2018, the PB initiative in District 7 was allocated $550,000 of which $250,000 was earmarked for spending on projects related to San Francisco’s Vision Zero initiative promoting traffic safety. There were 2,200 residents who participated in the project selection process (Erica Maybaum, August 2018, personal conversation with author). In District 10, $250,000 was available in FY 2018 (San Francisco n.d.(c)). PB was inaugurated in District 8 for FY 2018, with $250,000 allocated for the process.

San Francisco was the first city in the U.S. to use online project submission and voting in the PB selection process (Harrington, 2016). District 7 has implemented online project submission and voting since its first PB year (FY 2013-2014). In FY 2017, of the 1,504 votes cast in the District 7 PB process, 97 percent were cast online (Donovan, 2017). In District 10, online project submission and voting in the PB process was introduced for FY 2018 (Bourne, 2018). There was some concern that while online voting can increase access across PB communities, a lack of familiarity with, or access to, digital technologies may exclude some voters.

Buffalo, New York
Buffalo is located in the Buffalo-Niagara Falls Metropolitan Area of New York State. In 2018, with 256,304 residents (US Census Bureau, 2020), Buffalo had an operating budget of $488 million (Buffalo, 2018-2019). The city is governed by a mayor and Common Council (CC) whose members

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10 San Francisco’s municipal government consolidated its city and county entities in 1856. It has operated since then as one governmental entity officially known as the City and County of San Francisco.

11 The Right to City Alliance is an organization of close to 50 justice-related organizations working to foster human rights in the San Francisco area.
are popularly elected from nine districts. In July 2014, the CC appointed a steering committee to study how to implement participatory budgeting in the city. The committee included representatives of Buffalo’s Clean Air Coalition (CAC). CAC had been researching PB and meeting with Buffalo’s public officials to lobby for a PB initiative during the four years prior to the announcement of the Council resolution. This is a unique aspect of PB in Buffalo, as no other PB initiative in the U.S. has a clean air coalition as an active advocate.

Buffalo’s first PB initiative was established in Masten, one of the city’s nine CC districts. In 2015-2016, 300 voters ages 14 and over participated in Masten’s PB process to allocate $150,000 from the city’s general fund plus contributions from discretionary funds of all nine CC members (Rebecca Newberry, August 2018, personal correspondence with author). Of note, “Each Council member generally receives about $115,000 to $130,000 in discretionary funds each year... to use in their districts...” (Meyers, 2015). Since 2015-2016, however, no money from the city’s general fund has been set aside for Buffalo’s PB initiative. As stated earlier, the availability of “a dedicated source of public funding” is a sine qua non for a successful PB initiative. As stated earlier, the lack of funding for PB. In 2016-2017, the CC member from the city’s Niagara District earmarked $10,000 from his discretionary funds to be used for PB in his district (Rebecca Newberry, August 2018, personal correspondence with author).

In 2014, the city’s District 9 council member inaugurated a PB initiative for his district, referred to as the Empower Uptown Participatory Budgeting (PB) Process. For FY 2015, he allocated $295,000 in discretionary infrastructure monies (Inside District 9, n.d.) to fund the initiative, in which 2,676 voters, 14 years of age and older, participated. He allocated $250,000 for FY 2016 (Long Beach, n.d.). In Districts 1 and 3, a “modified” PB process was undertaken, paid for with the discretionary funds of the council members representing these districts. In both districts 1 and 3, however, a committee of stakeholders made the project choices rather than voters from the districts. Currently, there are no PB initiatives in Long Beach being funded by Council member discretionary funds.

St. Louis, Missouri

St. Louis is located in Missouri along the western bank of the Mississippi River. In 2018, with its close to 303,000 residents (US Census Bureau, 2020), the city had a $1 billion operating budget (St. Louis, n.d.). “The governmental structure of the City of St. Louis is unusual in the United States.... [it]...operates as both a city and a county “ (Stlouis-mo.gov, 2011-2020). St. Louis is divided into 28 wards, each of which is represented by a popularly elected member of the Board of Aldermen (city council). The president of the board, who is elected citywide, is its 29th member. As part of the city’s annual budget process, each alderman is given discretionary funds for ward improvements, e.g., sidewalk repair and street lighting. Prior to 2013, aldermen decided what projects to fund with their discretionary monies. In 2013, the 6th Ward alderman initiated a PB process in which 436 residents, 16 years of age and older, voted to fund three projects totaling $95,000 of the alderman’s discretionary funds (Gordon, 2014; Michelle Witthaus, August 2018, personal conversation with author). In 2015, an alderman decided what projects to fund with their discretionary monies. In 2013, the 6th Ward alderman initiated a PB process in which 436 residents, 16 years of age and older, voted to fund three projects totaling $95,000 of the alderman’s discretionary funds (Gordon, 2014; Michelle Witthaus, August 2018, personal conversation with author). In 2015, a PB process was initiated in the 15th Ward, with $100,000 to be allocated (over two years); 1,478 residents participated in the process, voting for five winning projects (Meganellyagiareen.com, n.d.). A third PB initiative that was to be undertaken in the 27th Ward never materialized (Michelle Witthaus, August 2018, personal conversation with author).

Long Beach, California

Long Beach is located in Southern California in the Greater Los Angeles Metropolitan Area. With its 467,354 residents (US Census Bureau, 2020), the city has an operating budget of more than $2.5 billion (Long Beach, 2017). Long Beach is governed by a mayor and a city council whose members, elected by popular vote, represent each of the nine districts. As part of the Long Beach annual budget process, council members are allocated an equal amount of discretionary funds, generally for spending on infrastructure projects in their districts, but other types of expenditures may be permitted.
In 2014, St. Louis was designated as a Promise Zone by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. A five-year grant of $4.7 million that St. Louis received from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2016 is being used to fund health-related activities in the zone. A PB process, in which Zone residents 11 years of age and older may vote, is being used to select projects to be funded with the grant “...in four specific areas: violence prevention, youth engagement, peer support, and mental health” (St. Louis ReCAST, n.d.).

**San Antonio, Texas**
San Antonio, located in southwestern Texas, has a population of more than 1.5 million people (US Census Bureau, 2020), making it the 7th largest city in the U.S. Its operating budget in 2018 was $2.7 million (San Antonio, n.d.(a)). The city has a council-manager form of government and is divided into 10 districts each of which is represented by a popularly elected member on the City Council. All Council members are allocated $50,000 in discretionary funds, annually, through the City Council Project Fund (CCPF) (San Antonio, 2000-2020). In 2018, two districts implemented the PB process: Districts 8 and 9. In District 8, there were 453 voters who allocated $25,000 from CCPF to fund four projects (San Antonio, n.d.). In District 9, the city made $1 million available from three funds for projects to be selected through the PB process: $25,000 from the CCPF; $775,000 from the D9 Pedestrian Mobility allocation of a 2017 bond; and $200,000 from the Neighborhood Accessibility & Mobility Program (NAMP) fund. Since there is no local ordinance in San Antonio that governs PB, projects selected through the process are submitted as recommendations to the relevant district council members (San Antonio, 2018).

**Durham, North Carolina**
Durham has a population of close to 275,000 people (US Census Bureau, 2020) and a budget of $511 million. Durham has a council-manager form of government, with the city’s mayor serving as presiding officer of the council (Durham, n.d.). In 2018, the city council appointed a 15-member PB steering committee and hired a consulting group, Our City, Our Voice, to design a PB process for Durham. While PB was established by an ordinance passed by the city council and was going to have two council members serving as liaisons to districts initiating the process, the process was to be “...implemented by City of Durham staff members from the Office of Budget and Management Services in partnership with the Neighborhood Improvement Services Department” (City Of Durham, 2018-2020, p. 1).

**Merced County, California**
Although PB is not an official government policy in Merced County, one of the elected members of the Merced Board of Supervisors, the County’s governing body, decided to implement the process in her district, one of five in the county. She used $40,000 of her discretionary funds to initiate the process in 2017 (Jeanne Marie Col, August 2018, personal communication with author). Round 2 began in June 2018 (McKenzie, 2017; Merced County, n.d.).

**CITYWIDE PB INITIATIVES**
Vallejo, California, was the first jurisdiction in the U.S. to implement a city-wide PB initiative, the approach taken in Puerto Alegre and other cities in Brazil and worldwide. As of 2018, five other cities in the U.S. had also implemented a city-wide PB process. Each is described below.

**Vallejo, California**
Vallejo, with a population of more than 120,000 people (US Census Bureau, 2020), is located in California’s San Francisco Bay Area. The City had a $226 million budget in FY 2018 (Vallejo, n.d.(b)). In 2011, Vallejo was emerging from bankruptcy and the 2007-2009 worldwide economic recession. To shore up its revenue base, Vallejo’s City Council, its legislative body, proposed a one percent sales tax that was approved by a bare majority of voters. The city decided to allocate a portion of the sales tax revenues to a PB initiative. In fact, the tax was referred to as a “stepping stone to
the adoption of participatory budgeting” (De Luca, 2018). Both infrastructure projects and program/service projects were to be eligible for funding in the PB process.

In 2012, Vallejo allocated $3.28 million to fund projects across the city through the PB process (Vallejo, 2018). Vallejo “...hired the Participatory Budgeting Project... to provide a framework, strategies, and options to styling a program” (Vallejo, n.d.(a)). The PBP managed the process for the first year after which time the city took over, under the overall direction of the city manager, with assistance from the PB Steering Committee.

“The Steering Committee is comprised of up to 21 members including: (1) a minimum of 12 persons representing Vallejo local civic organizations such as the Vallejo Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Solano Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Vallejo Chamber of Commerce; (2) one person from the City’s Housing and Redevelopment Commission (HRC); and (3) a maximum of 7 at-large members” (Vallejo, n.d.(a)).

All city residents and other stakeholders, including business owners as well as people who “physically work” in the city, attend school, or are parents of children attending school, are permitted to submit project proposals (Vallejo n.d.(b)). City residents 16 years of age and over are eligible to vote for projects proposed for their districts. In the first round of Vallejo’s PB process, about 4,000 people turned out to vote, giving it a participation rate higher than that in Chicago and New York (De Luca, 2015). In 2017, 5,200 people voted in the city’s PB project selection process.

Over the five PB cycles ending in June 2018, Vallejo allocated close to $8.8 million to its PB initiative, with more than 20,000 people participating in the process. (Vallejo 2018a. To encourage participation, the city publishes a monthly newsletter (Vallejo 2018b) that is available online. It also has established a communications network with all city residents who receive email messages that provide information on a range of topics, including participatory budgeting. Vallejo’s PB is often seen as a model for public participation and collaborative government and is often cited in articles about PB. The city has won several awards for its PB, including the Top 10 Innovations in Public Engagement Award from the Ash Center at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government in 2015, and the League of California Cities 2014 Helen Putnam Award for Enhancing Public Trust, Ethics, and Community Involvement (League of California Cities, 2020).

**Cambridge, Massachusetts**

Cambridge, with a population of 118,000 people (US Census Bureau, 2020), is located in the Greater Boston Metropolitan Area. Its FY 2018 budget was $605 million (Cambridge, 2017-2018). At the end of 2014, the PB concept was introduced to Cambridge by a member of the City Council, the city’s legislative body. The Council worked with the PBP in implementing the PBCambridge process that has since been managed by the city’s budget office. The 22-member volunteer steering committee (SC) that coordinates PBCambridge activities includes representatives of the city’s non-profit organizations and residents.

In the first cycle of PBCambridge, $528,000 was allocated for spending on capital projects located on city property. Project proposals are submitted online and through other venues. All residents 12 years of age and over, and other Cambridge stakeholders, may propose capital projects to be considered for PB funding. City residents 12 years of age and over are permitted to participate in project selection voting. In the first PB year, more than 2,700 voters participated in the process (PBCambridge, n.d.(a)); Pham, 2015). In the City’s second PB cycle, $600,000 was allocated for the process, with 4,184 participating voters (PBCambridge n.d.(b)). Jumping to the fifth cycle, which ran from May to December 2018, there were 6,849 Cambridge residents who voted on the allocation of $900,000 for capital projects in the city (PBCambridge, n.d. (e)).

**Greensboro, North Carolina**

As of the end of 2017, Greensboro, with its 295,000 residents (US Census Bureau, 2020), was the only city...
Table 1. Participatory Budgeting in the U.S.: Selected Characteristics (2018)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>PB Level</th>
<th>Initial PB Process</th>
<th>City Population</th>
<th>PB Participation 1</th>
<th>City Budget (2018) (in millions)</th>
<th>PB Allocation 1 (in thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Subarea Initiatives</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>9 of 51 Wards</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2,705,994</td>
<td>21,200</td>
<td>$8,600</td>
<td>$18,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City, NY</td>
<td>31 of 51 Districts</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>8,398,748</td>
<td>356,700</td>
<td>$85,000</td>
<td>$210,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>4 of 10 Districts</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1,030,119</td>
<td>1,550</td>
<td>$3,500</td>
<td>$1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>4 of 11 Districts</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>883,305</td>
<td>9,800</td>
<td>$9,700</td>
<td>$3250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo, NY</td>
<td>2 of 9 Districts</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>256,304</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>$488</td>
<td>$160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Beach, CA</td>
<td>1 of 9 Districts</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>467,354</td>
<td>2,676</td>
<td>$2,600</td>
<td>$545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
<td>2 of 28 Wards</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>302,838</td>
<td>1,914</td>
<td>$1,050</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlottesville, VA</td>
<td>5 Districts</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>48,117</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>$157</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio, TX</td>
<td>2 of 10 Districts</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1,532,233</td>
<td>1,427</td>
<td>$2,700</td>
<td>$1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durham, NC</td>
<td>3 Wards</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>274,291</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>$435</td>
<td>$2400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ithaca, NY</td>
<td>1 of 5 Wards</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>30,013</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>$72</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merced County, CA</td>
<td>1 of 5 Districts</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>274,765</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>$128</td>
<td>$40</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Vallejo, CA</td>
<td>Citywide</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>121,913</td>
<td>20,140</td>
<td>$101</td>
<td>$8790</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambridge, MA</td>
<td>Citywide</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>118,977</td>
<td>18,420</td>
<td>$605</td>
<td>$2630</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greensboro, NC</td>
<td>Citywide</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>294,722</td>
<td>2300</td>
<td>$535</td>
<td>$1000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hartford&lt;, CT</td>
<td>Citywide</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>122,587</td>
<td>2,396</td>
<td>$613</td>
<td>$2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>Citywide</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>744,955</td>
<td>7,737</td>
<td>$5,600</td>
<td>$3000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wickenburg, AZ</td>
<td>Town-wide</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>7,840</td>
<td>500^</td>
<td>$33</td>
<td>$115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freehold, NJ</td>
<td>Township-wide</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>34,735</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>$55.7</td>
<td>$200</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other PB Initiatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland, CA</td>
<td>CDBG Funds</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>429,082</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>$1,400</td>
<td>$784,678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niagara Falls, NY</td>
<td>CDBG Funds</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>48,144</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>$135</td>
<td>$720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>Ballot Box Art Project</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>383,793</td>
<td>500+</td>
<td>$1,700</td>
<td>$120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester, NY</td>
<td>Anti-poverty Funds</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>206,284</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>$525</td>
<td>$175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlottesville, VA</td>
<td>Arts Grant</td>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>48,117</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>$157</td>
<td>$18.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * High school and college initiatives not included
1 Totals for all cycles
^ 2018 totals not available/pending
b Not all wards/districts reported
c 2015 total
d Results of initial PB process pending
e All years not reported
f Results not available
in the southern part of the U.S. (see Map 1) to have implemented a citywide PB initiative (Greensboro, n.d.(d)). In FY 2018, the city’s operating budget was $535 million (Greensboro, n.d.(c)). In October 2014, the Greensboro City Council approved a resolution authorizing support of PB for FY 2015-16. Working with the PBP, the city set up a Steering Committee to coordinate PB in its five districts. Each of the five districts was allocated $100,000 for capital projects to be allocated through the PB process. The PB initiative also received funds from several philanthropic sources. Although the Greensboro PB process is city-wide, the money allocated for PB projects is divided into equal portions for each of the city’s five districts. Projects for PB funding may be submitted by Greensboro residents and other stakeholders, such as business owners. City residents 14 years of age and older may vote in the PB project selection process for projects in their council district.

Close to 1,100 people voted in Greensboro’s first participatory budgeting (PB) process, which allocated $500,000 in the city’s FY 2016-2017 budget. In June 2018, the participatory budgeting process initiative was expanded from a one-year to a two-year process, effectively decreasing PB allocations to $250,000 per year (Green, 2018; Greensboro, 2018). Due to the extended length of the PB process for Greensboro’s second PB cycle, the $500,000 funding was included in the city’s FY 2018-2019 budget (Green, 2018).

**Hartford, Connecticut**

Hartford, the capital of the State of Connecticut, has a population of 123,000 (US Census Bureau, 2020). In FY 2018, its operating budget was $613 million (Hartford, 2018). In 2015, the concept of PB was introduced to the Hartford City Council, the city’s legislative body, by a coalition including the Hartford Public Library, Leadership Greater Hartford\(^\text{13}\) and the Metro Hartford Alliance.\(^\text{14}\) In FY 2016, the first year of Hartford Decides, the name given to the city’s PB initiative, more than 1,200 voters decided how $1.25 million in capital improvement funds was to be allocated for capital projects, citywide. Voters included residents age 13 and over, as well as inmates at the Hartford Community Correction Center (Vella, V, 2016; Hartford Decides, n.d.(a)). In Year 2, the allocation was reduced to $250,000, with over 1,100 residents participating in the PB process (Hartford Decides, n.d.).

**Seattle, Washington**

Seattle has a population of 745,000 (US Census Bureau, 2020) and an operating budget of $5.6 billion (Seattle, 2018). In 2015, the city contracted with PBP to set up a PB process and hired community members to work on developing Seattle’s PB initiative. The Director of Seattle’s Department of Neighborhoods reported that the relationships Seattle formed during the start-up phase “...would later help it during the voting phase, as these community groups legitimized PB to community members who voted on projects” (Axelrod, 2019, Designing the Process, para. 4).

Seattle’s PB process began with the launching of “Youth Voice, Youth Choice,” a citywide PB initiative in which Seattle’s youth were given the opportunity to decide how to spend $700,000 city budget dollars (Seattle, n.d.). In 2016, more than 3,000 Seattle residents ages 11 to 25 voted for projects to be funded through the PB process. In 2017, the program was expanded to include all Seattle residents, with $2 million of the city’s budget earmarked for Your Voice, Your Choice: Parks and Streets, an initiative in which Seattle residents decide how to spend a part of the City’s budget on small-scale park and street improvements (Seattle, 1995-2018; Browne, 2017). In 2018, $3 million was allocated to fund 51 projects, including those designated in the City’s Equity and Environment Initiative. These projects were located in “geographic areas where communities of color, immigrants, refugees, people with low incomes, Native peoples, and limited-English proficiency individuals tend to live” (Seattle, 1995-2018a).

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\(^{13}\) Leadership Greater Hartford is a community action program that provides leadership training programs for working-age professionals, older adults, and high school students.

\(^{14}\) Metro Hartford Alliance is a business and economic development organization established in 2001 as a merger between the Hartford Chamber of Commerce and the MetroHartford Economic Growth Council.
**Participatory Budgeting in Smaller Municipalities**

Several U.S. jurisdictions with fewer than 50,000 residents have also implemented a PB process. In 2018, a PB initiative was undertaken in Ithaca, New York, a city with 30,000 residents (US Census Bureau n.d.(b)), with an allocation from the city budget of $10,000 (Ithaca, 2018). All city residents 12 years of age or older who live, work, or go to school in the City of Ithaca, were eligible to participate in project selection although, in the pilot year, the projects were to be implemented in just one of the city’s five wards (Ithaca.com, 2020). In Charlottesville, Virginia, home to 46,912 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.), the City Council allocated $100,000 in its FY 2019 budget for the city’s initial participatory budgeting initiative (Cresanti, 2018) but, as of this writing, the process has not been implemented. The township of Freehold, New Jersey, with fewer than 12,000 residents (US Census Bureau, n.d.(a)) became the first municipality in the state to implement a PB process with a $200,000 allocation (Freehold, 2018). In Wickenburg, Arizona, a PB process was initiated in 2017 with more than 500 of its 7,409 residents (US Census Bureau, n.d.(e)) voting on how to allocate $50,000 (Gilger, 2017). The Town Council allotted $65,000 to continue the process in 2018 (Wickenburg, 2017-2018).

**OTHER PB INITIATIVES**

PB has been used to involve citizens in decisions regarding the allocation of specific pots of money. For example, Oakland, California was the first city in the U.S. to use the PB process to allocate federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. In 2017, two of Oakland’s seven districts had implemented the process; District 1 allocated $227,308 and District 2 allocated $557,870, both over two years (PBOakland, n.d.) with about 1,200 residents participating in the process. Niagara Falls, New York, has also used PB to allocate $360,000 in CDBG funds (NF-CD, n.d.; PB 360, n.d.). In Rochester, New York, the PB process was used to allocate $200,000 in anti-poverty funds (Singer 2018). In Cleveland, Ohio, a PB process was used for its Ballot Box Project to fund arts projects totaling $120,000 (Ballot Box, 2020).

Similarly, Charlottesville, Virginia used PB to allocate $18,500 in grant money for arts projects (Lorne, 2017).

**PB YOUTH AND SCHOOL INITIATIVES**

Several U.S. cities have allocated funds for PB to be used in high schools as a “... powerful approach for building stronger communities and more informed and empowered students” (Crews, 2019). The Phoenix Union High School District in Arizona was the nation’s first city to implement a PB process using school district funds. PB was implemented at one city high school for 2013-2014. By 2017-2018, it had expanded to 10 schools, with large schools getting $7,000 and smaller schools, $4,000, to be allocated by 10,158 student voters using the PB process (Phoenix Union High School District, 2018).

In Boston, Massachusetts, a youth-led PB process, assisted by the PBP, was implemented in 2014 (Augsberger 2016; Insua 2015; Youth Lead the Change, n.d.). An allocation of $1,000,000 in capital funds was provided in the 2014 fiscal year budget for the youth initiative, known as “Youth Lead the Change” (YLC). The PB rule book stipulated that proposed capital projects had to be located on City-owned property, had to cost at least $25,000 and have a useful life of at least 5 years (Youth Lead the Change, n.d.; Insua, 2014).

In Tacoma, Washington, the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department funded a PB process in 2017 in three schools located in Eastside Tacoma, one of Pierce County’s greatest-need communities. The PB objective was to improve community health and involve students in budget decisions that affect them and to keep them socially connected (Suburban Times, 2017; TACOMA, Washington, TPS News Blog, 2018). In 2017-18, approximately 2,500 students in the three schools participated in the PB process, deciding on how to spend $100,000. Lincoln High School, alone, was allotted $60,000, “...the largest school-based participatory budgeting process in the country”

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15 The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for local community development activities such as affordable housing, anti-poverty programs, and infrastructure development.
Sacramento, California’s MET High School, implemented PB in 2015 and 2016 with $2,500 and $5,000 allocated each year, respectively. In Philadelphia, seventh to twelfth graders at the First Philadelphia Preparatory Charter School decided how to spend $2,500 of a $100,000 National Constitution Center grant (The Met Sacramento High School, 2017). PB initiatives have also been implemented at several colleges including Palo Alto College in San Antonio, Texas (Garlisi, 2015), and four of 24 City University of New York (CUNY) colleges: The Graduate Center, Brooklyn College, Queens College, and Hunter College (Dateline: CUNY, n.d.; DSC, 2018; Jordan, 2016; PBP, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

Participatory budgeting was launched in the U.S. in 2009 in Chicago, Illinois, by a member of the city’s Board of Aldermen (the city council) who used $1 million of his discretionary funds to bring his constituents directly into the local budget decision-making process. By 2018, 23 more jurisdictions had instituted a PB process: six citywide; 12 in selected areas (districts) of cities, some with multiple initiatives; and five to allocate specific pots of money, e.g., CDBG funds (see Table 1). In another six cities, a PB process was established specifically for young voters or initiated in high schools to involve students in budget decisions. In Seattle, what started as an initiative for young voters would evolve into a citywide initiative. Several colleges across the U.S. have also initiated a PB process, including four at City University of New York.

There is variation in the PB initiatives in the U.S. with respect to program structure, i.e. citywide or in select districts, and to other characteristics such as the minimum age at which participants can vote (11-16), and collaboration with local groups advocating for PB. On the other hand, there is little variation among PB initiatives concerning (1) the multi-stage process for project selection; (2) the importance of community support for the PB process; and (3) the need for support from people with the authority to let residents decide how to spend government money. There is also little variation in the challenges PB faces across jurisdictions. For example, while online voting to select PB projects for funding has helped many cities to expand citizen engagement in the budget process, downsides of online voting include a lack of understanding or access surrounding digital technologies among groups usually disenfranchised from the electoral system. Another challenge facing all PB initiatives is citizen participation. Although most cities are using social media and other types of advertising to get people to participate in the PB process, they all have to contend with the relatively small number of people who turn out to take part in the process (see Table 1). In New York City, for example, in 2018 there were fewer than 400,000 PB participants out of more than eight million residents. Even in Vallejo, California, where the PB participation rate is the highest in the U.S., less than five percent of the city’s population has been involved in the process. A related challenge is the relatively small amount of city budget money being allocated through the PB process, both in dollars and as a percent of local government expenditures (see Table 1). However, as William Goldsmith, former mayor of Indianapolis and Deputy Mayor for Operations in New York City opines:

“The success of the program cannot be measured in dollars or voter headcounts alone. Participatory budgeting, and programs like it around the country and the globe, have the capacity to enliven democracy and engender more-engaged electorates. In this sense, participatory budgeting is not just a mechanism for rationing out dollars but also for educating and empowering voters” (Goldsmith, 2019).

It should also be noted that a major strength of PB is how the process has helped to de-mystify the “black box of budgets” by educating and empowering voters to participate in budget decisions, especially individuals previously marginalized in the political process, including people of color and immigrants. It should, however, be noted that PB initiatives in some places, including Long Beach California and Buffalo, are no longer being funded. Research is needed to determine
why this has happened.

Several evaluations of individual PB programs are summarized in Godwin (2018). The 2018 study by Public Agenda and PBP referred to earlier in this paper is a big step for PB evaluation research (2018), but its focus is primarily on inputs. Additional research is needed to assess PB outcomes, especially with regard to its impact on the public budgeting process. Two PB cities – New York and Vallejo – have been recipients of awards from the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard Kennedy School. We argue that while it may be seen as a democratic innovation (Godwin, 2018) for PB to have a sustained effect on government budgeting, it has to be institutionalized into the overall budget decision-making process. Institutionalization, however, is a complex and difficult process that has not always been achieved when new approaches have been introduced into the budgeting process. As PB comes of age in the U.S. and is adopted by more and more places, research is needed to track its sustainability through institutionalization into government budget processes.

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